AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-5 (Canceled)

Claim 6 (Currently Amended) A shaft seal mechanism forming a leaf seal in an annular space between a rotor and a stator, comprising:

a plurality of thin plates lapped on one another in layers in a circumferential direction of the rotor and arranged in the annular space between the rotor and the stator so as to form a thin plate assembly of an annular shape; and

a pair of flexible thin plate retaining rings between which an outer circumferential proximal end side of each of said thin plates is pinched so as to be retained by said retaining rings;

wherein said outer circumferential proximal end side of each of said thin plates is supported on a stator side and an inner circumferential distal end side of each of said thin plates is non-fixed to an outer circumferential surface of said rotor so that said thin plate assembly of annular shape divides the annular space into a higher pressure side area and a lower pressure side area;

further comprising a deviation preventing member arranged between said outer circumferential proximal end side of said thin plates and said thin plate retaining rings so as to regulate motion of each of said thin plates relative to said thin plate retaining rings; and

wherein said pair of thin plate retaining rings each have an approximate C-shape as seen in a cross-section taken along an axis of rotation and together form concave portions in which said outer circumferential proximal end side of each of said thin plates and said deviation preventing member are fitted so that said thin plate assembly is pressed on its outer circumferential side.

Claim 7 (Canceled)

Claim 8 (Currently Amended) The shaft seal mechanism of claim ~~7~~ 6, wherein:

said thin plate assembly has a side edge~~, in an axial direction of the rotor~~; formed with an annular ~~a~~ recess;

a side plate has a side surface formed with a stepped portion engaged ~~engageable~~ with said recess;

said side plate abuts ~~is arranged to abut~~ said thin plate assembly in the axial direction of said rotor ~~so that said stepped portion corresponds to said recess~~; and

said thin plate assembly is pinched together with said side plate between said pair of flexible thin plate retaining rings.

Claim 9 (Canceled)

Claim 10 (Currently Amended) A shaft seal mechanism ~~forming a leaf seal between a rotor and a stator, comprising:~~ according to claim 6,

~~a plurality of thin plates lapped on one another in layers in a circumferential direction of the rotor and arranged in an annular space between the rotor and the stator so as to form a thin plate assembly of an annular shape;~~

~~wherein said outer circumferential~~ proximal end side of ~~each of said thin plates is supported on a stator side and an inner circumferential distal end side of each of said thin plates is non-fixed to an outer circumferential surface of said rotor so that said thin plate assembly of annular shape divides the annular space into a higher pressure side area and a lower pressure side area; and~~

wherein mutually adjacent ones of said outer circumferential proximal end sides of said thin plates of said thin plate assembly are welded to each other so as to be fixed to each other and said thin plate assembly of said thin plates so welded is bent along a circumferential plane of said annular space.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended) A shaft seal ~~mechanism forming a leaf seal in an annular space between a rotor and a stator, comprising:~~ according to claim 6, wherein:

~~a plurality of thin plates,~~ each of said thin plates has ~~having~~ a length with said ~~an~~ outer circumferential proximal end side at one end and said ~~an~~ inner circumferential distal end side at an

opposite end, a width extending in an axial direction of said rotor, and a thickness, wherein each of said thin plates is wider than it is thick at said inner circumferential distal end side;

wherein said plurality of thin plates are lapped in the ~~a~~ circumferential direction of the rotor to form said ~~a~~ thin plate assembly so that ~~in which~~ said thin plates overlap each other in their thickness direction.~~; and~~

~~a pair of flexible thin plate retaining rings between which said outer circumferential proximal end side of each of said thin plates is held so as to be retained by said retaining rings;~~

~~wherein said outer circumferential proximal end side of each of said thin plates is supported on a stator side and said inner circumferential distal end side of each of said thin plates is non-fixed to an outer circumferential surface of said rotor so that said thin plate assembly of annular shape divides the annular space into a higher pressure side area and a lower pressure side area.~~

Claim 12 (Previously Presented) The shaft seal mechanism of claim 6, wherein each of said thin plates has a length, width and thickness, wherein each said width extends in an axial direction of the rotor, and each said thickness extends in a direction in which said thin plates are lapped, said width being greater than said thickness.

Claim 13 (New) The shaft seal mechanism of claim 6, wherein said deviation preventing member is elastically deformable to generate an activating force.

Claim 14 (New) The shaft seal mechanism of claim 6, wherein said deviation preventing member comprises a spring urging said thin plates relative to said thin plate retaining rings such that rattling movement of said thin plates relative to said thin plate retaining rings is prevented.

Claim 15 (New) The shaft seal mechanism of claim 6, wherein said deviation preventing member comprises a spring urging said thin plates relative to said thin plate retaining rings such that rattling movement of said thin plates relative to said thin plate retaining rings is prevented.